

Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program

By Tessa Lemos Del Pino

One of the most shocking sessions in my law school orientation was that each of the first year students in my class was given information on depression and counseling the eve of our first day of law school. At that time, I learned that this profession suffers from a very high depression rate. Unfortunately, for many lawyers it goes beyond depression and into suicide as we have witnessed this year by some of our own. As the holidays approach, for those suffering from clinical depression, this season can be particularly difficult and exacerbate their depression and a need for help.

The Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program offers free and confidential assessment, referrals, interventions, education, advocacy and peer support services for lawyers, judges, bar applicants, law students and their families. TLAP services address a range of health and personal issues such as: alcohol/drug abuse, stress burnout, marital/family problems, depression, compulsive gambling, eating disorders, sexual compulsivity, and old age/senility.

In July, Laura Gatrell, a long time TLAP staff member, was promoted to executive director of TLAP. One of her initiatives is to make sure that members of the profession are aware that TLAP is here to serve the legal community, whether you are a law student, attorney, or judge. In an effort to expand their ability to service numerous TLAP's referrals that pertain to mental health, stress, depression and life balance issues, TLAP also recently hired Ted Rice, a licensed counselor to serve as Assistant Director.

Ms. Gatrell shared that "Lawyers suffer from depression, anxiety, hostility, paranoia, social alienation and isolation, obsessive-compulsiveness, and interpersonal sensitivity at alarming rates. For example, researchers affiliated with Johns Hopkins University found statistically significant elevations of major depressive disorder in only three of 104 occupations. Lawyers topped the list, suffering from Major Depressive Disorder at a rate 3.6 times higher than nonlawyers who shared their key socio-demographic traits."

Furthermore, lawyers suffer from alcoholism and use illegal drugs at rates far higher than non-lawyers. According to Ms. Gatrell, "One out of three lawyers suffers from clinical depression, alcoholism or drug abuse. Not surprisingly, a preliminary study indicates that lawyers commit suicide and think about committing suicide more often than non-lawyers."

While these rates are alarming for the profession, Ms. Gatrell went onto say that women are less likely than men to seek help because women suffer from feelings of guilt while men typically suffer from feelings of remorse and "Guilt carries self-condemnation. Remorse does not." She also says that "Women are twice as likely as men to suffer depression and anxiety disorders.

If the stress of practice, studying for the bar, or law school is not enough, the holidays can exacerbate areas of people's lives that are already stressed like relationships, finances and physical strain. During this time, we spend more time with our families, misunderstandings occur, there are competing needs, and bad feelings can intensify. Conversely, if you are facing the holidays alone that can bring on feelings of sadness and isolation. With the holidays come additional expenses for gifts, travel, food and entertainment. The competing demands of making ends meet and taking on these holiday additional expenses can cause financial strain that affects your emotional well-being. Last, rushing around shopping for these gifts and juggling the calendar to attend the holiday events all while you must maintain the same level of work production and year-end closing activities allows little time for sleep, exercise or errands and chores can leave one exhausted and prone to illness.

Laura Gatrell indicated "If you or an attorney you know, need assistance, TLAP professionals will listen to the issue presented, recommend appropriate options, and help you develop a suitable plan of action." All calls to TLAP are free and confidential. Call the TLAP staff at 1-877-424-8527 or email questions to Laura at lauragatrell@bellsouth.net.

Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program (TLAP)

**Don't just hope things will get better, CALL: 615-741-3238
or toll free: 877-424-8527.**

To send questions by email: lauragatrell@bellsouth.net

Confidential Suicide Hotline

(800) 273-TALK